

STATE HISTORICAL
SOCIETY OF IOWA
IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

The Annals of Iowa

Volume 58 | Number 2 (Spring 1999)

pps. 233-235

Landscape in Sight: Looking at America

ISSN 0003-4827

Copyright © 1999 State Historical Society of Iowa. This article is posted here for personal use, not for redistribution.

Recommended Citation

"Landscape in Sight: Looking at America." *The Annals of Iowa* 58 (1999), 233-235.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.10258>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

Kehoe traces how this system of regulation, which had evolved gradually, unraveled in the post-World War II years. Step by step the federal government took more and more control over the regulation of pollution despite strong protests from state authorities. The process culminated in the 1972 amendments to the Federal Water Pollution Control Act, which were designed ultimately to eliminate all water polluting discharges with the assistance of the Environmental Protection Agency created two years earlier. Very specific rules and the power of the federal government to sue and fine polluters replaced the states' approach of "cooperative pragmatism, with its reliance on volunteerism and informal action." But the states continued to play a significant cooperative role in negotiations and enforcement. Pollution control is a federal partnership.

Kehoe has traced these developments in careful detail, showing how government structures changed with the creation of more effective agencies for research, policy development, and enforcement, especially during the 1960s and '70s. He explains the key roles of dramatic episodes in environmental degradation, the environmental movement, and a widespread public outrage in producing notable progress in cleaning up the lakes. His account demonstrates how environmental reform can happen, but he notes at the same time that victories were limited and that sustained effort is critical to continued improvement in water quality. The study is based on extensive archival research at the state and federal levels, and in newspapers, technical journals, and printed government documents. The one notable weakness in this impressive study is neglect of the Canadian side of the reform effort to clean up the politically divided but geographically united Great Lakes. Nevertheless Kehoe makes a valuable contribution to the environmental history of the Midwest.

Landscape in Sight: Looking at America, by John Brinckerhoff Jackson, edited by Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997. xxxiv, 400 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$35.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY WAYNE FRANKLIN, NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

J. B. Jackson was the person most responsible for reminding modern Americans how much landscape—the *made* scenery of human experience—has mattered in the life of the country. *Reminding* is not strong enough. Those who have read Jackson on the subject often describe their first exposure to his ideas as if it gave new power to their own

vision. Historian Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, who has culled this impressive collection from across the whole of Jackson's long career, thus speaks of the "revelation" (x) that came to her upon reading Jackson's *American Space: The Centennial Years, 1865-1876* when it was published in 1972. She then turned to the journal *Landscape*, which was founded by Jackson in 1951 and run by him until 1968. My own experience was similar, although the revelation was doubled by the fact that I had first read the British scholar William G. Hoskins's similarly eye-opening volume, *The Making of the English Landscape* (1955). One is reformed, not simply informed, by such intellectual experiences.

Born to American parents in Dinard, France, in 1909, John Brinkerhoff Jackson was educated on both sides of the Atlantic before taking his B.A. in history and literature at Harvard in 1932. A sometime newspaper reporter and architect student, he served in U.S. combat intelligence during World War II, an experience that made him adept at reading both the landscape and the many means by which humans codify it—maps and aerial photos, especially. When the war was over, he produced his first landscape prose, small guidebooks to specific European localities intended for American troops. Once back in the United States, Jackson returned to the Southwest, where he had worked on an uncle's ranch before the war, and briefly devoted himself to the rancher's life. A riding accident cut short that career, but recuperation gave him time to gather his impressions from the war-time years and codify his real vocation. The journal *Landscape* was the result.

Landscape in Sight is not the first book to gather Jackson's insightful sketches of the American scene, but it is the best. Working in consultation with Jackson prior to his death in 1996, the editor has chosen more than three dozen pieces, mostly from *Landscape*, and has arranged them in several useful sections. She is right to claim that the result is the only volume that gathers Jackson's "most highly regarded writing on the American landscape." And it offers more. The editor has made cautious corrections of obvious mistakes in the originals, and more importantly prepared a bibliography of Jackson's writings on landscape. The volume is wonderfully enriched by Jackson's photographs and drawings, including sketches produced during his many journeys abroad. Because Jackson's prose itself often aims to *sketch* scenes (many of his essays in *Landscape* were short, evocative pieces), the visual counterparts here are especially welcome.

Jackson deserves great credit for popularizing the study of the American landscape. He was no environmentalist; it was not nature that held his interest so much as the thing people make in and out of

nature. His apparent insensitivity to "green" issues, though, should not obscure how pervasive his influence has been even among environmentalists. Perhaps his most important concept, however, has been the notion of the "vernacular" landscape. As opposed to the highly engineered scenery produced by designers such as Frederick Law Olmsted, most of the landscape of a country or region is produced by the way relatively free ordinary agents act in the world according to their own innate sense or shared cultural templates. Jackson's most profound assurance to his readers—and his acolytes—was an immense fearlessness before the sometimes tawdry landscape of modern America. House trailers did not frighten him, nor did roadside strips arouse any elitist disgust in him. He viewed such consequences of human action as objects of curiosity rather than as targets of scorn. While the more sinister landscapes of industrial America, from New York's Love Canal to the federal wasteland at Hanford, Washington, might have given Jackson more pause, if we are to love the land we probably have a need for as much of Jackson's wonder and acceptance as we can muster. He indeed still helps us keep the *Landscape in Sight*.

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.